

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8226

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMEMBASSY GABORONE BY POUCH

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL LOURENCO MARQUES

AMEMBASSY LUANDA

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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AMEMBASSY MASERU BY POUCH

AMEMBASSY MBABANE BY POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT SF

SUBJ: NEW WHITE LIBERAL POLITICAL MOVEMENT FOR SA

1. SUMMARY: CULMINATING MONTHS OF PREPARATION, FIRST PUBLIC MEETING OF VERLIGTE ACTION, SOUTH AFRICA'S NEWEST LIBERAL POLITICAL MOVEMENT, WAS HELD JUNE 29 IN JOHANNESBURG. THOSE WHO SPOKE AT MEETING REPRESENTED BROAD SPECTRUM OF POLITICAL VIEWS, BUT ALL WERE AGREED THAT PRESENT POLITICAL PARTIES ARE INCAPABLE OF ACHIEVING REAL SOLUTION TO SOUTH AFRICA'S RACIAL PROBLEM. VERLIGTE ACTION'S GOAL IS TO
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MOBILIZE WHITE PUBLIC OPINION TO SUPPORT NECESSARY FUNDAMENTAL SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGES. CLOSE COOPERATION WITH NON-WHITES AS INTEGRAL PART OF ONE "MULTIFORM" NATION WOULD FOLLOW. IMMEDIATE TASK IS TO ESTABLISH ORGANIZATIONS IN ALL FOUR

PROVINCES AND FORMULATE PLANS OF ACTION. DESPITE INITIAL ENTHUSIASM AND MEMBERSHIP WHICH INCLUDES PROMINENT AND INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE, VERLIGTE ACTION FACES EXTREMELY TOUGH SLEDDING. IT MUST CONTEND NOT ONLY WITH FORMIDABLE OPPOSITION OF WELL-ENTRENCHED NATIONAL PARTY AND INSTITUTIONS OF AFRIKANERDOM, BUT ALSO COMPLACENCY AND DEEPSEATED RACIAL PREJUDICES OF MAJORITY OF WHITE ELECTORATE. END SUMMARY.

2. OVER 400 PEOPLE ATTENDED JUNE 29 INAUGURAL MEETING OF VERLIGTE ACTION (VA) AT JOHANNESBURG'S CRANBROOKE HOTEL. WHILE MANY OF THOSE PRESENT EITHER BELONG TO OR SYMPATHIZE WITH AIMS OF PROGRESSIVE PARTY, ENOUGH PROMINENT PERSONS FROM ACADEMIA, BUSINESS AND OTHER FIELDS WERE IN EVIDENCE AND TOOK ACTIVE PART TO COUNTER CHARGES WHICH ALREADY HAVE BEEN RAISED THAT VA IS NO MORE THAN GROUPING OF PROGRESSIVES UNDER NEW LABEL.

ONE OF FOUNDERS, PRETORIA UNIVERSITY LAW PROFESSOR W.A. JOUBERT, SAID MEETING CULMINATED MANY MONTHS OF PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS. FORMATION OF VA BECAME KNOWN IN LATE MAY WHEN SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS REPORTED MEETING OF EIGHT MEN -- INCLUDING, AMONG OTHERS, PROG LEADER COLIN EGLIN, UNITED PARTY MP JAPIE BASSON, FORMER HEAD OF SA DEFENSE FORCE GENERAL R.C. HIEMSTRA AND JOUBERT -- WHOSE PURPOSE WAS TO LAUNCH A NEW POLITICAL MOVEMENT.

3. SINCE THEN, LEADING POLITICAL PERSONAGES LIKE BASSON AND EGLIN HAVE, BY MUTUAL AGREEMENT, BEEN DISSOCIATED FROM VA, ALTHOUGH LESSER FIGURES OF PROGRESSIVE AND UNITED PARTIES ARE ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING. JOUBERT HAS TOLD US THAT IN ITS FORMATIVE STAGE AND PERHAPS FOR SOME TIME TO COME, VA DOES NOT WANT TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH ANY POLITICAL PARTY FOR FEAR OF BEING CATEGORIZED AS ARM OF PROGS OR UNITED PARTY AND ALIENATING PEOPLE WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE AGREE WITH ASPIRATIONS OF NEW MOVEMENT. ALSO, INITIALLY VA WILL BE ALL-WHITE. ACCORDING JOUBERT, BLACKS, COLOREDS AND INDIANS ARE TIRED OF DISCUSSIONS WITH WHITES WHICH LEAD NOWHERE, AND HAVE TOLD VA FOUNDERS THEY DO NOT WANT TO PARTICIPATE YET. WHITES, JOUBERT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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SAID, "MUST ACHIEVE A CHANGE OF HEART" AMONG THEMSELVES BEFORE TRYING TO GET TOGETHER WITH NON-WHITES.

4. JOUBERT AND OTHER SPOKESMEN FOR VA REFER TO "LOGJAM" THAT CHARACTERIZES STATE OF POLITICS INVOLVING RULING NATIONAL PARTY AND OPPOSITION UNITED PARTY AND DEMONSTRATES THAT PRESENT WHITE POLITICAL STRUCTURE IS INCAPABLE OF SOLVING SOUTH AFRICA'S RACE PROBLEMS. TO END STALEMATE AND DIVERT SOUTH AFRICA FROM ITS DISASTROUS COURSE, VA HOPES TO "MOBILIZE PUBLIC OPINION" THROUGH A "GRASS ROOTS MOVEMENT," AS JOUBERT PUT IT TO US, WHICH WILL EFFECT A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN ATTITUDES ON RACE AND ON HOW SOUTH AFRICA CAN SURVIVE AS A

NATION. THIS WILL INVOLVE A RE-STRUCTURING OF SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICS AND THE EVENTUAL FORMATION OF A NEW POLITICAL PARTY.

5. AS EXPRESSED FORMALLY AT JUNE 29 MEETING, VA REPRESENTS A POINT OF DEPARTURE FROM WHICH NEW GOALS MUST BE SET. FOUNDERS OF VA STATE: "WE ACCEPT THAT THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATION IS CHARACTERIZED BY ITS MULTIFORMITY, BUT THAT THE GROUPS COMPRISING OUR SOCIETY, IN SPITE OF GROUP DIFFERENCES, HAVE A COMMON DESTINY; THAT THIS MULTIFORMITY AND OUR MUTUAL COMMITMENT AS A NATION MAKE JOINT PLANNING ESSENTIAL; THAT ALL PEOPLE ...ARE ENTITLED TO A LIFE CONSONANT WITH HUMAN DIGNITY IN THE FULLEST SENSE OF THE WORD. OUR AIM IS TO DEFINE OUR TERMS OF CONSENSUS AND TO DEVISE A MEANS OF GIVING EFFECT TO THIS CONSENSUS."

6. SUBSCRIBING IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER TO URGENT NEED TO BRING ABOUT ENLIGHTENED CHANGE, SPEAKERS AT JUNE 29 MEETING INCLUDED GENERAL HIEMSTRA; DR. MARIUS BARNARD, HEART SURGEON; DIRK REZELMAN, NATIONAL PARTY'S FORMER PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER; S.A. STRAUSS, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA LAW PROFESSOR; J.E. ROBERTS, CHAIRMAN OF SA'S LARGEST CONSTRUCTION COMPANY; S.B. CHILLIERS, UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH PROFESSOR; LIEB LOOTS, EX-PRESIDENT OF RAND AFRIKAANS UNIVERSITY STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL; AND OTHER PROMINENT AFRIKANER AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING SOUTH AFRICANS.

7. FOLLOWING SPEECHES, JOUBERT ANNOUNCED THAT INTERIM COMMITTEE HAD BEEN FORMED TO PLAN THE WORK OF VA AND TO PREPARE FOR MEETINGS IN OTHER PARTS OF SOUTH AFRICAN WHICH
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WILL LEAD TO A NATIONAL CONVENTION LATER THIS YEAR. INTERIM COMMITTEE COMPRISED OF WELL-KNOWN BUSINESSMEN, PROFESSIONALS, AND SPORTSMEN, AND HEAVILY LARDED WITH AFRIKANER UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS.

8. COMMENT: VERLIGTE ACTION FACES STEEP UPHILL BATTLE. ALTHOUGH ASSUREDLY THERE ARE MANY REASONABLE WHITES IN SOUTH AFRICA WHO WANT CHANGE AND HAVE WITHHELD THEIR SUPPORT FROM EXISTING POLITICAL PARTIES, AS YET THEY ARE BELIEVED TO CONSTITUTE ONLY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF WHITE POPULATION. NATIONAL PARTY CAN BE EXPECTED TO FIGHT VIGOROUSLY AND RUTHLESSLY IF NEW MOVEMENT APPEARS TO POSE REAL THREAT TO ITS CONTINUED DOMINANCE. ALREADY NATIONALIST PRESS HAS ATTACKED VA AS TOOL OF PROGRESSIVES AND UP YOUNG TURKS AND REFERRED TO IT CONTEMPTUOUSLY AS SMALL GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS EMBARKED ON A "POLITICAL FANTASY."

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9. IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT IF VA SUCCEEDS IN GETTING OFF GROUND, IT MAY NOT BE ACCORDED WARM RECEPTION IT SEEMS TO EXPECT FROM BLACKS. VIEWS EXPRESSED IN SPEECHES JUNE 29 WERE NOT UNIFORMLY PERCEPTIVE OF NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF BLACKS, AND IN FACT CONTENT OF ONE SPEECH (BY ROBERTS) WAS HIGHLY PATRONIZING.

10. EFFORTS OF RACIAL MODERATES IN SA HAVE HERETOFORE BEEN NOTABLE FOR LACK OF SUCCESS. NEVERTHELESS NEW MOVEMENT HAS ACTIVE BACKING AND PARTICIPATION OF PROMINENT AND INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE WHOSE AFFILIATIONS CUT ACROSS PARTY LINES. SOME
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FINANCIAL SUPPORT HAS BEEN RECEIVED FROM UNNAMED INDUSTRIALIST AND JOUBERT SAYS HE EXPECTS MUCH MORE, ALTHOUGH IT CAN BE EXPECTED THAT WEALTHY POTENTIAL DONORS WILL WAIT TO SEE HOW MOVEMENT DEVELOPS BEFORE THEY LOOSEN PURSE STRINGS. MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR VA HAS IN ITS FAVOR IS THAT A GROWING NUMBER (THOUGH, AGAIN, STILL A MINORITY) OF WHITES ARE QUESTIONING

WHETHER NATIONAL PARTY POLICIES ARE IN BEST INTERESTS OF SOUTH AFRICA.

11. VERLIGTE ACTION WILL RECEIVE MUCH ATTENTION IN DAYS TO COME BECAUSE OF ITS HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL NATURE AND BECAUSE IT REPRESENTS A NEW AND VIVID MANIFESTATION OF WHITE LIBERAL SENTIMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA. ITS INCEPTION REFLECTS INCREASING FRUSTRATION OF THOSE WHO REALIZE THE DANGER INHERENT IN POLICIES OF OSSIFIED, INSENSITIVE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAS AT PRESENT. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHAT EFFECT NEW MOVEMENT WILL HAVE. THE ODDS ARE HEAVILY AGAINST ITS ACHIEVING ITS GOAL OF POLITICAL-SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF WHITE SOCIETY WHICH WOULD PERMIT COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH UNENFRANCHISED BLACKS. ANY SOCIETY IS CAPABLE OF CHANGE. BUT THEY HOLD THAT POLITICAL, CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL FORCES AND INSTITUTIONS OF AFRIKANERDOM HAVE OVER MOST AFRIKANERS IS VERY STRONG. VA'S APPEAL IS GOING TO BE AIMED AT GRASS ROOTS LEVEL OF WHITE SOCIETY. IT IS HERE, UNFORTUNATELY, THAT COMPLACENCY AND RACISM ARE MOST FIRMLY ENTRENCHED.
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